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FM AMCONSUL SURABAYA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0140
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0064
RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 0007
RUEHCAA/GEOLOGICAL SURVEY DEPT OF INTERIOR WASHINGTON DC
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 0126
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0020
RHHMUNA/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0062
RUEHJS/AMCONSUL SURABAYA 0143

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DEPT FOR EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP, EB/ESC/IEC
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SUBJECT: EAST JAVA MUDFLOW UPDATE: RAINS THREATEN DAMS, YET CLEAR
THE RIVER; KAPOLDA PUTS CRIMINAL CASE ON HOLD

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. The same monsoon rains that weakened and broke a dam at the Sidoarjo mud flow site January 3 have paradoxically improved the flow of the Porong river, clearing it of sedimentation. Sidoarjo Mud Management Agency (BPLS) Deputy of Operations, Mr. Soffian Hadi told ConGen Surabaya that there is no longer excess mud sedimentation in the Porong River. Soffian added that previous mud sedimentation had reduced the flow rate of the Porong to only 400 meters cubic per second. Rain increased the flow to 939 cubic meters per second in December and (as of this week) to 1,600 cubic meters per second-- its normal rate of flow. BPLS spokesman Zulkharin told reporters that the increased flow rate is damaging the levee that contains the Porong, requiring the BPLS to make repairs.

¶2. Sedimentation of the Porong was most severe during the dry season (May-October). With no rain and a lack of upstream pressure, mud quickly precipitated to the river bottom. This caused concern regarding the ability of the river to clear the mud poured into it in sufficient quantity to prevent flooding inhabited areas along the river. Currently, as the mud flows out of the ground, it is combined with river water in a holding lagoon; the mix is then pumped into the Porong on its way to the sea. On January 10, BPLS used all its available pumps to channel the mud into Porong River and the river successfully handled the flow. Currently, the mud flows out of the epicenter at roughly 1.2 cubic meters per second, while the total capacity of three pumps is 3.6 cubic meter per second. BPLS plans to install 15 new pumps to further increase the capacity of the spill way.

¶3. Use of the river as a means of moving the mud continues to be controversial with the local population. Consequently, some 200 officers from the East Java Police will help BPLS protect the worksite in order to prevent any interference with installation of the pumps, according to Soffian. Protests have affected other efforts at the site (reftel). Local media report that the main detour around the mud flow site continues to be plagued with flooding due to almost daily heavy seasonal rains. On January 10, the height of flood waters around Siring Village, north of the mudflow containment reached 40 centimeters causing serious traffic congestion. The height of floodwaters around

the railway tracks that border one side of the mud containment reached 37 centimeters on the same day. However, despite flooding and frequent traffic stoppages, this key route around the mud containment remains open.

Police Put Criminal Case on Hold

¶4. The January 8-14 edition of Tempo magazine reported that East Java's Regional Police Chief Inspector General Herman Surjadi Sumawiredja (Kapolda) had announced to journalists in late December 2007 that he had decided "to park" the case against the Lapindo company "for the good of the public." Although the police still believe that the mudflow was caused by human error and negligence on the part of Lapindo, the Kapolda claimed that putting pressure on Lapindo could jeopardize compensation to the victims. The police are also concerned that conflicting expert testimony about the cause of the disaster and recent court decisions denying charges brought by the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation and the Indonesian Forum for the Environment raised questions about their ability to secure a conviction.

COMMENT:

¶5. The conversation in East Java has shifted from how to stop the mudflow to how to mitigate its impact. Like the mudflow itself, this disaster has hit Indonesia along a series of weak spots: political leadership, legal protections, weak infrastructure, and corruption. Given the complexity of the task, implementation of a successful long-term mitigation effort will require leaders who can get beyond the political maneuvering to address the problems head on. We look forward to reading the USGS report based on the recent visit to Sidoarjo.

MCCLELLAND